

## Law on the Frontlines

*Legal Reference for Public Libraries*



Via Canva

# Best Practices for Legal Reference

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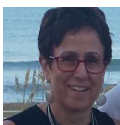
## Introductions



Catherine McGuire  
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Maryland Thurgood Marshall State Law Library



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Executive Director  
Maryland Access to Justice Commission



Joan Bellistri  
Director  
Anne Arundel County Public Law Library

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## Self-Assessment

What is your level of comfort with questions about law and legal matters?

1. I'm just a beginner.
2. I've had a few legal questions. I want to learn more.
3. I feel pretty confident but would like to brush up on my skills.

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## Learning Outcomes



Describe Access to Justice and why it matters to public libraries



Identify a legal reference question and employ best practices to manage the reference interview



Choose and employ top resources for legal information



Assess referral options and select appropriate options

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# What is Access to Justice?

**Our justice system**

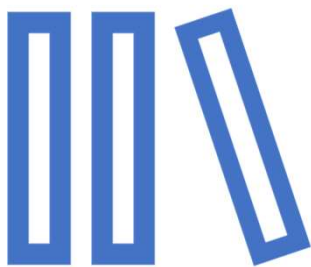
**Legal assistance in many forms**



**Public libraries are a trusted community partner**

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## Access to Justice

What is the role of public libraries in the matter of access to justice? Choose all that apply:

- a. Public libraries are a source of reliable information.
- b. Public libraries are trusted in their communities.
- c. Public libraries are widely available, both for location and hours.

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## Your experience

What kind of questions about law does your library get? Choose all that apply:

1. Questions about family matters, like divorce and child support.
2. Questions about how to write a will or handle an estate when a loved one dies.
3. Questions about how to get government benefits like food stamps or unemployment.
4. Questions about court processes, like how to sue someone.

**What other kinds of questions do you get? Share in the chat!**

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## What do I need to know about legal reference?

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## Interpersonal Dynamics

- Emotions impact the interaction – both patron and provider
- Focus on "can" rather than "cannot"
- Set limits
- Develop and practice scripted language

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## Information not Advice

- The difference is...
  - Are you *broadening* or *narrowing*?
  - Who has the power?
- Rephrase – look for the information nugget
- Trust your instincts
- Ask a colleague

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## Self-Test

A patron comes to your reference desk with the following question: "My ex got a new job and I think he's earning more money now. Can I make him pay more child support?" Which of the following is the best response option?

1. Of course you can demand more! There's probably a form you can fill out.
2. I can't give you legal advice. You should ask an attorney.
3. So, you're looking for information about modifying your child support? I can help you find information on that topic.

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## Rely on your strengths

- Help find information
- Demonstrate how to use resources
- Education about the content and structure
- Suggest other sources of information
- Direct to other providers

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## Ask for more information

- What have you looked at so far? Who have you talked to?
- Where did you hear about...?
- Where is this happening?
- Are you in court or aiming to be in court? Do you know which one?
- Do you have any paperwork I could see?

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## Determine the need

Information  
Law  
Legal Assistance  
Services  
Forms

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## What can you access?

Which of the following can you access from your library? Choose all that apply.

1. Legal texts in our library's collection, like publications from Nolo, Sphinx, or the Maryland Bar Association.
2. Databases, like Gale Legal Forms or Nolo.
3. Legal databases like Westlaw and Lexis.
3. We partner with our local community college, which has a paralegal program, so we can borrow from them.

Do you find helpful resources on the basic internet? What are your favorite internet-based legal information sources? Share them in chat!

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## Where should you start?

- Maryland People's Law Library
- State Law Library – Gateway to Maryland Law
- Maryland Judiciary
- Nolo.com
- Cornell Legal Information Institute
- What can you access already?
  - Your library catalog
  - Partner libraries

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Where can  
they go next?

- PLL Legal Services Directory and Clinic Calendar
- Local resources – county law library!
- Maryland Court Help Centers
- Government agencies

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Local  
resources

Does your county have a local county law library?

YES

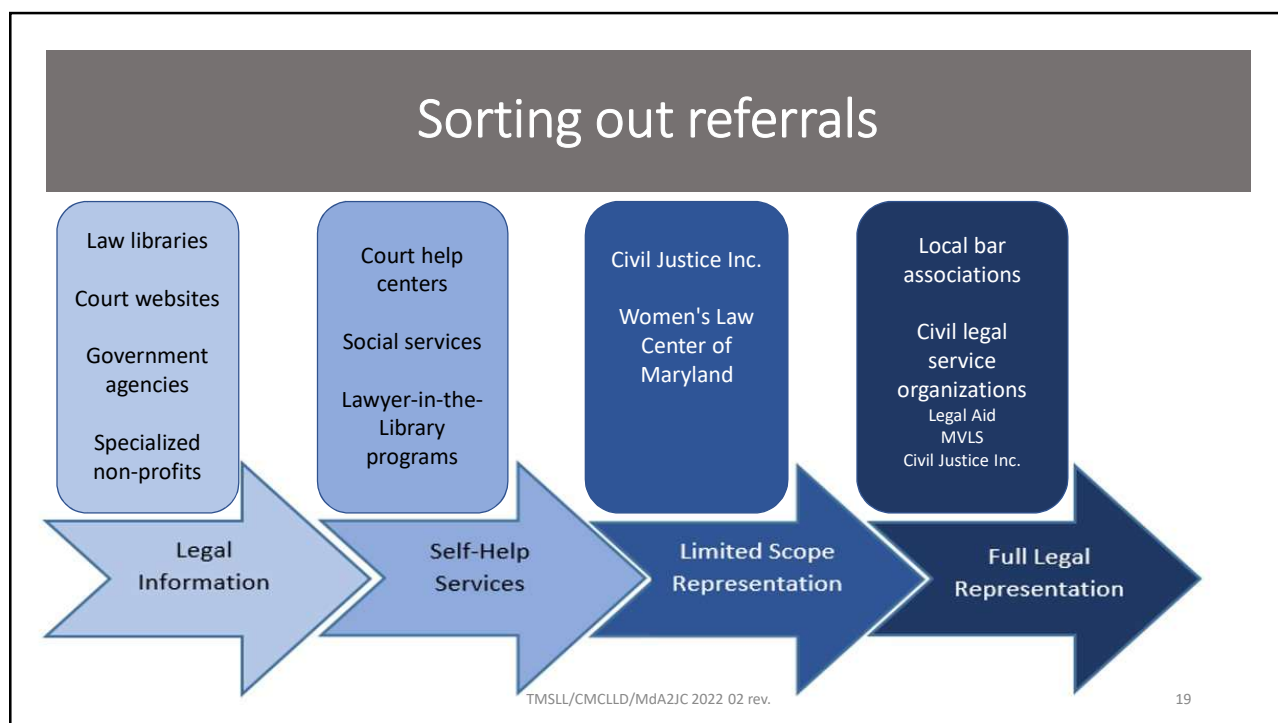
NO

I don't know.

If you don't know, type your county into the chat window and we'll tell you!

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**Maryland Thurgood  
Marshall State Law Library**

[www.mdcourts.gov/lawlib](http://www.mdcourts.gov/lawlib)

410-260-1430

[lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov](mailto:lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov)

**Maryland Court and  
County Law Libraries**

[www.mdcourts.gov/ccli](http://www.mdcourts.gov/ccli)

**Maryland Access to Justice  
Commission**

[www.mdaccesstojustice.org](http://www.mdaccesstojustice.org)

**Law on the Frontlines**

[mdcourts.gov/lawlib/using-library/for-librarians/legal-reference-training](http://mdcourts.gov/lawlib/using-library/for-librarians/legal-reference-training)

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